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# REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE BRITISH NATION.

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Thursday, December 25. 1707.

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THO' I have not in my *Northern Pilgrimage* had an immediate Communication with *London*, nor am concern'd in your *Hurries*, your *Clubbing* and *Caballing*, &c. Yet I lately made a Trip into my native Country, and took Occasion to view what was doing in some of your *Northern Parts*— And really, my Country-men, you are a strange Kind of People, a Man cannot set his Foot in the remotest Part of this *Pirry*-ridden Nation, but he sees Matter of *R* marks, and Occasion to talk to you in the Language of *Satyr*.

A Man is no sooner in *England*, he cannot set his Foot over the *Border*, but he falls a *Party-making*, a *Dividing*, a *Caballing*, *Church* against *Dissent*, and *Dissent* against *Church*, nay *Church* against *Church*,

and *Dissent* against *Dissent*, *Father* against *Son*, and *Son* against *Father*, and what do you think is the present Subject, it is a *strange Subject*, I confess; *strange*, considering what the *Parliaments* of *England* in several Sessions have done to prevent it, what *A&S* of *Parliament* have been made, what *Penalties* have been charged upon the *F&D*, and what *Examples* have been made in the *House*, on these Accounts!

But to speak of that by it self, let us a little consider the thing it self; is it not *strange*, that as soon as ever the *Period* of a *Parliament* shall be put in *View*, tho' a *Year* remote, the *Gentlemen* of the *Country* shall be forming themselves into *Clubs*, and making *Interest*s and *Parties* all over the *Nation* for a new *Election*! — I do not say they are *treating*, and *bribing*, and *spending*

Spending Money now upon the Electors, upon the Freeholders and Free-men, and buying, be-speaking, cajoling the poor blinded People into selling their Country, to they do not know who — But I do say, they are making Interests for a new Election in a great many Places ; and what is understood by making Interest, let the Country explain: I wish, some were to ask the Question, that can demand an Answer, I mean, that could both require an Answer, and punish the Fact.

I must confess on one Hand, allowing the Method to be just, *which, by the Way, I by no Means do grant*; but for Argument Sake, allowing it to be just, yet it is not fair Play to the Members of the House, who are now sitting, and who are absent from Home on the Service of their Country, that these Gentlemen should be supplanting their Interest among their Friends.

I know, 'tis objected, that they do not break the Law, if they do treat and spend Money at this Distance, for the Act of Parliament restrains them from the Time of issuing out the Writ.

This, I confess, is just like all our other Practice in *England*, of evading the Meaning of our Laws by adhering to the Letter of them. The true Intent and Meaning of the Act of Parliament was to prevent the scandalous Custom of Bribery, and other ill Practices made Use of in Elections of Members of Parliament. Will any Man say, it was design'd to prevent Bribery, after the Writ was issued out for the Election, but that all the same Extravagancies were lawful to the very Date of the Writ? — This is our Unhappiness in *England*, that we make it our Study not to obey, but to evade the Law; and whenever an Act of Parliament is made against a scandalous Practice, we lay all our Heads together to find out Methods, how we may commit the Crime, without incurring the Penalty. This is one Occasion of that common receiv'd Maxim, That *England* has the best Laws, the worst executed of any Nation in the World.

But give me Leave, O ye mad Men of *England*, who are every Day selling your Birth Rights, for a worse Trifle than *Ezau* did his — Was this Act of Parliament made for your Advantage or your Prejudice? if the last, why do you not represent it to the

House, and get it repealed, as no doubt you might upon Proof, that it was really injurious to the Nation: But if it be advantageous to you, why will you not suffer only, but assist in the Breach of it? *Ezau* was a hungred, and ready to perish, it seems, and so parted with his Birth right on some real Pretence; but you that drink up your Liberty in Ale, cannot pretend Thirst, but you gorge your selves with the Live-Blood of your Country, and go home drunk with the Poison of your own Liberties; Wretched, blinded Miserables, that take Bribes to entrust your Nation, your Families, your Freedom, your Posterity, your Estates, and your Religion, with those whom you ought to expect, will expose and betray the <sup>you</sup>!

I confess, this looks at first like a hard Saying, because these may be very honest Gentlemen that endeavour to get in; but how will this Question be answer'd, why he should give six Pence to be chosen a Member of Parliament, that cannot get four Pence honestly by sitting there? I forbear to enter any farther into this, which is the Substance of the Argument, I shall deferr it, till the proper Season of Elections comes on, when GOD willing, I shall give it its due Answer, and speak at large to it, since I look upon the ensuing Election to be one of the most critical Occasions, that may happen to *Britain* in some Ages.

But the Case before me seems to call for some Remarks, which I hope may be useful; the House of Commons, now sitting, have found Occasion to observe the Absence of their own Members, insomuch that they have thought fit to order the Sheriffs of the Counties to give a Kind of Summons to those, who are yet in the Country to attend.

This, as a Step which has not been lately, nor I believe frequently taken, signifies to us, that some of the Members are not yet pleased to be at the House; I shall not so much as suggest, that they remain behind to secure their Interest in the Case of a new Election, but this I may say, I hope, without any Offence, if they do stay behind on that Account, 'tis a farther Proof, that this anticipating of Elections is a mischievous Practice, and I could say more of its Mischiefs too, were it not that I rather aim at its being rectify'd, than at exposing the Persons.

And why is this early Application made, if it be not really to take the Opportunity of the Absence of the present Members, to supplant their Interest, and secure the People against them? Indeed, Gentlemen Freeholders, this is but a very sorry Return to them, for their applying themselves to the faithful Service of their Country, and their travailing so many hundred Miles to represent you. Again, 'tis unjust, for it is reserving your selves no Room to judge, whether they are worthy or unworthy by their Behaviour, since you engage your Votes against them, without waiting to see how they serve you now they are in.

Upon the whole, it is unkind to them, unjust to your selves, and treacherous to the whole Nation; and I believe, all the honest, unbias'd, impartial Lovers of their Country would joyn Heart and Hand to have it redress'd.

But how must it be done, says one now, *that is rather willing to make it difficult than see it solv'd?* O, Sir, it is so easie to be done, that it would seem a Presumption in me to mention it; one Clause added to the old Act for regulating Elections, to make it criminal, either to give any Money, Treat, or any other Consideration at all, as well before as after the issuing the Writ, this would do it—But it it be objected, that this will be evaded, and Ways found out—I offer,

That an Act of Parliament making it Forfeiture of a Right of voting on the Elector, and unqualifying to serve for ever in the Person to be elected, if directly or indirectly, either by Word, or Gift, Expence, Con-

sideration, or Obligation, any Person should so much as be spoke to, or asked for his Vote before the Day of Election, and upon the Place of Election.

If possibly it should be made Criminal, so much as to talk of the Election, or mention the Names of the Candidates, that Notice should be given at the several usual Places, both of the Day of the Election, and the Persons who propose themselves to be chosen, at the same time and no sooner, and that no Man should be solicited one Way or other, on the Penalties aforesaid.

I could enter a great Way into the particular Methods to make such an Act effectual; but that is not so much to the Purpose, as to tell you, when it was made effectual, how advantageous it would be to the Nation, and what Mischiefs it would prevent.

The present Case is only in Respect to the so long anticipating the Elections, and I wish, I were at Liberty to launch out a little in the very unhappy Consequences of it: I doubt not but it would move the House to take it into Consideration, and to let the World see, that the late Act of Parliament was not made only to limit Treating and Bribing to a certain Time, or as I may say, put it at a greater Distance from the Time of Election; but that its Intent and Meaning was to remove such a scandalous Practice from the very Nation, if possible, and restore the Election of our Representatives to its primitive Freedom, and to that Impartiality of Voting; this the Nature of the Trust requires.

## MISCELLANEA.

I Entred upon a Proposition in my last, for the Encouragement of our Colonies in America; I hope, no Body will be so weak to imagine, I place all the Colonies Improvement upon that of New England only, I may in Time speak of the rest, but I mention this first, because it was the Place pointed at by those, who in former Days thought it the publick Interest to crush and discourage our Colonies, and under that Notion

all the rest suffer'd, whether they had *Dissenters* among them or not.

Now, blessed be GOD, that Devil of Division is laid among us, and a Calm of Spirit seems to fill our Constitution; I think, it cannot be amiss to expose the Folly of this Nation, that when these little Sisters who have no Breasts come in Remembrance before us, we may not stand in the Way of their Blessings, from a mistaken Prejudice raised.